

MICHIGAN FREEDOM TRAIL COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN

ADOPTED IN LANSING MICHIGAN, FEBRUARY 19, 2003

PREAMBLE

Public Act 409 of 1998 established the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission and directed it to:

- Review, plan, and implement a master plan to promote and preserve the history of the Freedom Trail and Underground Railroad in this state.
- Work in conjunction with state and federal authorities to sponsor commemorations, linkages, seminars, and public forums on the Freedom Trail in this state and neighboring states.
- Assist and promote the making applications for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places for significant historic places related to the Freedom Trail and Underground Railroad in Michigan.
- Assist and develop partnerships to seek public and private funds to carry out activities to protect, preserve, and promote the legacy of the Freedom Trail and the Underground Railroad in this state.

The commissioners were appointed in February 2002. They held their first meeting on May 7 of that year, electing Mary Edmond as their chairperson and De Witt S. Dykes, Jr. as their vice-chair. They made their first order of business the creation of a strategic plan to guide their work in the coming years. The commissioners, listed below, adopted this plan on February 19, 2003, and committed to review, update and report on it to the legislature and the people of Michigan each year.

Dr. William M. Anderson

Kathleen J. Blake

Christy S. Coleman

De Witt S. Dykes, Jr.

Mary A. Edmond

Michael D. Evans

Terry Hall

Wilber B. Hughes, III

Carol E. Mull

Dr. Weldon Petz

Dr. Harry Reed

Nancy R. Robertson

Richard J. Strowger

Margaret McCall Thomas Ward

MISSION

The Michigan Freedom Trail Commission encourages, coordinates and supports work that makes the history of the Underground Railroad a vital part of Michigan's civic discourse, its educational resources and its cultural tourism product.

VISION

Michigan's Underground Railroad history will be documented, preserved and supported throughout the state.

Underground Railroad history, which is an inclusive story (as a story of inclusion), will provide a common ground for building strong, sustainable communities by helping us value each other as we live today and plan for tomorrow.

Michigan will be widely recognized as a steward and a part of Underground Railroad history. It will be known as a state that carefully researches its role in the Underground Railroad and effectively shares its Underground Railroad history with its youth, citizens, tourists and the broader National Underground Railroad Network.

STRATEGIC PLAN

GOAL 1: SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

To nurture and build the capacity of the organizations, institutions and individuals that are the stewards of the Underground Railroad story—the “modern day” conductors

OBJECTIVE 1: Work with other agencies to create mechanisms to increase the local, state and national funds available to support Underground Railroad projects and ensure their fair and equitable distribution

STRATEGIES

1. Assess the financial need
2. Create the case statement for the importance and significance of Michigan’s role in the Underground Railroad
3. Work with the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, the Michigan Humanities Council, the State Historic Preservation Office, and other state entities to identify available funds
4. Identify other sources of funding to support the commission’s Underground Railroad priorities for the State of Michigan

OBJECTIVE 2: Create a recognition program for exemplary achievement in research and work

STRATEGIES

1. Designate a logo
2. Create an Underground Railroad site identification system
3. Host an annual recognition program
4. Establish criteria and process for nominating and selecting award recipients for exemplary achievement in research, preservation, education, tours and signage

OBJECTIVE 3: Foster excellent communication and coordination within the Michigan Underground Railroad network

STRATEGIES

1. Establish relationships with organizations in Canada, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Wisconsin that are doing work that might be beneficial to Michigan
2. Foster a means of sharing information
3. Identify and work with appropriate organizations to promote events and exemplary projects and activities important to the Underground Railroad
4. Publish a semi-annual newsletter containing Underground Railroad activities, events, discoveries, educational activities and research notes

GOAL 2: DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

To increase accurate, authentic knowledge and interpretation of the Underground Railroad in Michigan

OBJECTIVE 1: Define the depth and breadth of the story, including connections to other states and countries and post-Civil War people and events

STRATEGIES:

1. Create and maintain a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary materials and archival collections
2. Identify Michigan works of art and music associated with the UGRR
3. Identify links to similar work in Canada, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin

OBJECTIVE 2: Foster additional research and its dissemination

STRATEGIES

1. Encourage the investigation of archaeological sites with a goal of at least five sites investigated over the next 10 years
2. Encourage the gathering of oral traditions, accounts and narratives
3. Encourage placing primary documents on a web site
4. Encourage publication, exhibits, theater, lectures and other means of sharing Underground Railroad history with the public
5. Encourage research about all participants in the Underground Railroad story and the presentation of an inclusive history
6. Encourage research in primary sources
7. Maintain a list of current research and researchers on the Underground Railroad

OBJECTIVE 3: Foster broad education in documentation methods, research, evaluation, and nomination of sites

STRATEGIES

1. Distribute the National Park Service booklets on researching the Underground Railroad
2. Work with state-wide educational institutions, organizations and consultants to host workshops on research, evaluation and documentation methods
3. Hold workshops in new and existing communities interested in their Underground Railroad heritage

GOAL 3: IDENTIFICATION AND PRESERVATION

To ensure that Michigan's Underground Railroad sites persist because they are identified, preserved and maintained

OBJECTIVE 1: Advocate for the preservation of Michigan Underground Railroad sites

STRATEGIES

1. Create and promote a Critical List of Michigan Underground Railroad Sites
2. Partner with preservation and economic development organizations to encourage recognition and preservation of Underground Railroad sites
3. Maintain and promote a complete list of Michigan Underground Railroad sites

OBJECTIVE 2: Set standards/language for recognizing Michigan sites

STRATEGIES

1. Familiarize commission with National Park Service criteria and Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin programs
2. Establish criteria and process for recognizing Michigan Underground Railroad sites

OBJECTIVE 3: Encourage listing of UGRR sites in the National Register of Historic Places, the National Park Service National Network to Freedom, and in state and local historic districts

STRATEGIES

1. List and prioritize sites not already recognized
2. Select at least one UGRR site and encourage its application as a National Historic Landmark
3. Provide a list of resources for researching and nominating sites
4. Encourage local historians, historic district coordinators and historic organizations to identify and list sites
5. Encourage identification and National Park Service Network to Freedom listing with a goal of 10 sites per year for the next 10 years

6. Disseminate information regarding application process for national listings
7. Conduct workshops in collaboration with representatives of national programs
8. Identify funding for grant preparation
9. Develop an optional application review committee

GOAL 4: EDUCATION

To make the Underground Railroad recognized as a subject of study in its own right—not just an appendage of the Civil War

OBJECTIVE 1: Foster the creation of and access to accurate, authentic teaching materials compatible with the Michigan Curriculum Framework

STRATEGIES

1. Identify existing materials and link them to the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission web site
2. Promote the development of Underground Railroad education lessons, units, books and other curriculum materials
3. Adapt and evaluate authentic teaching materials for placement on the Michigan Freedom Trail web site
4. Identify existing education programs
5. Conduct discussions with teachers
6. Foster relationships with school districts that have a significant curriculum

OBJECTIVE 2: Foster the creation of lifelong learning educational opportunities

STRATEGIES

1. Collaborate with the Michigan Historical Center and the Michigan Black History Network to continue the Michigan Annual UGRR Summit
2. Hold month-long weekly discussion groups in various communities

OBJECTIVE 3: Increase the number of schools and educators teaching Underground Railroad history

STRATEGIES

1. Encourage or create workshops and in-service programs for teachers

2. Work with the Michigan Department of Education to ensure that the Underground Railroad is part of the Michigan Social Studies Curriculum Framework and part of the Michigan Education Assessment Program
3. Sponsor a session at the Council of Social Studies and other discipline's annual meeting

GOAL 5: CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

To give authentic Underground Railroad history a level of public and heritage tourism recognition equal to that of the Great Lakes, the automobile and lighthouses

OBJECTIVE 1: Encourage the identification of sites and programs for the public

STRATEGIES:

1. Designate a logo and identification system for Michigan
2. Identify and promote currently marked sites
3. Encourage the establishment of new, authentic Underground Railroad programs for the public
4. Encourage an increase in the number of Michigan Historical Markers on the Underground Railroad
5. Encourage communities to institute annual local observances of the Freedom Trail

OBJECTIVE 2: Make the Underground Railroad a Michigan Cultural Tourism destination that attracts Michigan and out-of-state travelers

STRATEGIES:

1. Create printed and web tour-guides in conjunction with Travel Michigan
2. Identify and promote existing, authentic UGRR tour programs
3. Identify existing travel publications and web sites and encourage them to feature the Underground Railroad
4. With Travel Michigan, create a cultural tourism marketing program for the Freedom Trail
5. Document the economic impact of Underground Railroad heritage tourism